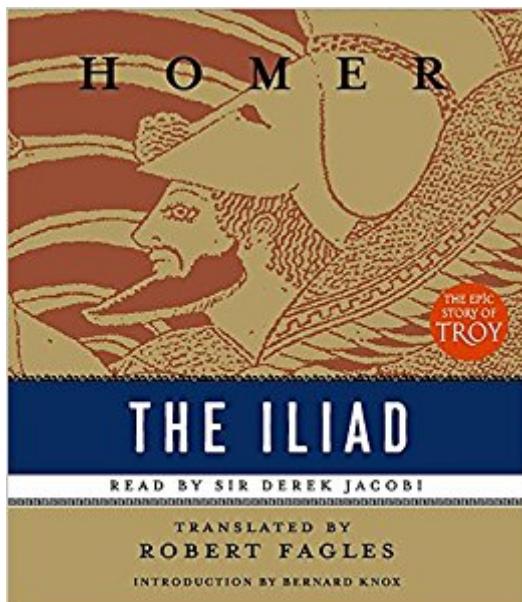


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The Iliad



Synopsis

This masterful new verse translation of Homer's classic story of the Trojan War has been hailed by critics as "an astonishing performance" and "a remarkable tour de force." Robert Fagles, chairman of the Department of Comparative Literature at Princeton University, brings the energy of contemporary language of this 2,700-year-old epic, while maintaining the drive and metric music of Homer's poetry, as well as the impact and nuance of Homer's mesmerizing repeated phrases. As a scholar, Fagles praises Homer's directness and simplicity, the breadth of his imagination, and the power of his song. As a translator, he brilliantly captures these very qualities—which makes this *Iliad* not only a superb literary work, but a tremendous listening experience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

So great is the impact of ancient Greek literature on Western culture that even people who have never read Homer's *Iliad* or *The Odyssey* know a lot about them. The Trojan Horse, Achilles' heel, the Sirens' call, Scylla and Charybdis—all have entered popular mythology, becoming metaphors for the less heroic situations we face in our own lives. Ever since these oral poems were committed to paper (probably in the 8th century B.C.E.), people have been translating them. The version of *Iliad* translated by Stanley Lombardo is a brave departure from previous translations; Lombardo attempts to adapt the text to the needs of readers rather than the listeners for whom the work was originally intended. To this end, he has streamlined the poem, removing many of the stock repetitions such as the infamous "rosy-fingered dawn," or rewriting them in ways dependent on their context. What emerges is a vivid, lively rendition of one of the world's great stories of men and war. But

classicists, beware: This *Iliad* has something of a '90s sensibility, from the cover art (a photograph of the D-Day Normandy landing) to Achilles' Rambo-like diction. It might well outrage the purists, but for those who remember their musty high-school reading of Homer's great epic with a barely suppressed yawn, Lombardo's energetic translation is just the version to change their minds. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

More than almost any other book, Homer's *Iliad* is meant to be spoken aloud, so it's a natural fit for audiobooks. With his fluid translation of ancient Greek into the rhythms of contemporary conversation, Lombardo has rendered the story of the final stretch of the Trojan War and its plethora of jealous, vengeful gods and warriors feasting, battling and endlessly speechifying, more boldly modern and recognizable than the remote marble tableaux conjured by most other versions. Lombardo's expert reading makes the tale's convolutions easy to follow despite its length, and though he doesn't always reach for the extremes one might expect (Achilles' crashing rage sometimes sounds like mere irritation, and soldiers faced with certain death can seem less than petrified), his voice does become mesmerizing. The interruptions between books, in which Sarandon reads synopses of the next, are jarring and unnecessary, since the synopses are printed in a handy booklet, along with a useful map and list of names and places. Similarly, while the thrumming cello and percussion theme that opens and closes each book sets the tone nicely, the electronic chords that sometimes accompany dreams, deaths or appearances of the gods are rather off-putting. Such quibbles notwithstanding, Lombardo's *Iliad* both sings to 21st century ears and holds true to Homer's original vision; the blind bard would be proud. Lombardo has also translated and narrated Homer's *Odyssey* for Parmenides. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Before I begin, a disclaimer. This review is not written to help you decide whether to read the *Iliad*. It is to help you decide which translation of the *Iliad* to choose. In short: In 2015, this is the best translation to get. Get it in paper, not Kindle. Peter Green states in the introduction that he is following in the footsteps of Lattimore, to preserve as much of the poem in Greek--wording, sentence structure, meter, and so on--in English, but to also make it declaimable. It is a translation to be read aloud. Thus, it is also a challenge to Fagles's translation, among whose virtues is how well it works as an audiobook. To review, there are several major verse modern translations of the *Iliad*. Lattimore's is closest to the original Greek, and for undergraduate work can substitute for the original well enough. There is the Fagles translation, in modern free verse, is wonderful to read

aloud. The Fagles Odyssey was on Selected Shorts once, and for a long time after I insisted that there was no other worthwhile contemporary translation of Homer. I swore by it. Lombardo's translation is pretty common in colleges because of the price and the slangy presentation. Then there is Fitzgerald, which some swear by, but Fitzgerald's translation is loose with the Greek and mannered and fey in its English. It even translates Odysseus as "Ulysses," a sure sign that fidelity to the Greek is not worth the translator's trouble. I am missing some others, I'm sure. So let us begin at the beginning. In the Greek, the Iliad has "Ἄγαρε θεά της Αχιλλέως φύγε μάνειν τον Αχιλλέα." Quite literally, "Rage! sing goddess of the son of Peleus Achilles." Αγαρε θεά της Αχιλλέως φύγε μάνειν τον Αχιλλέα means, more or less, the anger that engenders revenge, rage, wrath, anger are all ok to some degree. (It's complicated, an entire scholarly treatise is written on the meaning of the word.) Green gives, "Wrath, goddess, sing of Achilles Peleus's son's [/ wrath]." Fagles gives "Rage--Goddess sing the rage of Peleus's son Achilles." Lattimore gives "Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus." Green and Fagles are right to put the first word first. This is poetry, after all, the order of the words matter, the first especially. The first word is the theme of the poem, the way it is directed first against Agamemnon, then toward the Trojans, and then tempered for a common moment of humanity, is the internal trajectory of the whole epic. Wrath might be best of all, since it conveys that it is anger in a sense that is unfamiliar to modern readers. Once, in my second year of taking Greek, I was told that there was no use of literal translations. Take it far enough, and you wind up with a textbook on how to read the book in the original Greek. Make it into readable English, and you wind up with a host of compromises where thousands of close translations might do. Go far enough you wind up with Girardoux's "The Trojan War Will Not Take Place," worthwhile on its own, but not really a "translation." That professor preferred Fitzgerald, but easy for her to do, she could read anything in Greek without any help. For us mortals with mostly forgotten Greek, or no Greek at all, closeness to the original in a translation should be treasured. In the end, translating Homer is a game of compromises, How much of the strangeness of 2500 year old lines and 3200 year old motivations do you keep? Dactylic hexameter calls for lines much longer than any form of English verse, so shorter lines or not? And so on. For me, Fagles is as far to compromise with how English verse should go as I am willing to accept. For what it's worth, Lattimore's English verse is better than his critics complain of. Starting from no knowledge of Greek, I'd choose Green. Over Lattimore because it's friendlier for the beginner and not worse as far as I can tell for a serious third reading. Over Fagles because the true-to-the-Greek line lengths convey the way the poem drives itself forward better in Green's line by line than in

Fagles's free verse. Also. The introduction includes a plot summary of the whole Trojan War, of which the Iliad only covers a small portion. I have never seen such a succinct and complete synopsis before. There is also a synopsis of the poem keyed to the poem in the back matter to help find your place, an enlightening glossary of names and concepts to help you through your first read, and footnotes to inform the reader of context that has since been lost. Word to the wise re: Kindles. These are long verse lines. To get complete lines on a Kindle screen, you need a Kindle that allows text to display in landscape mode. Even then, complete lines only work in a very small font size. Get this in hardback for now. The hardback is stitched and bound to keep, so it is worth your money.

This is not a book review, but a warning: there is a technical problem with this page. I received a different translation than the one shown here, and apparently the page changes randomly (since someone else says this is the page for buying a copy of the Iliad!). I've reported the problem and it is being looked into. Because you can't leave a review without a star rating, I've using one star for this warning. That's no reflection on the book described here, which I hope to purchase once corrects this problem. I know this is an unusual use of book reviews, but I think it's important for people to know that if they purchase from this page there is no telling what they might receive. I will delete this once the problem is solved,

This review is concerned with the translation of Homer's Iliad by Anthony Verity: it is about the intellectual product, not some essentially irrelevant technical issue regarding the vending of the work. Anthony Verity set out to faithfully translate the original text (as best we know it) of Homer's great poem. He clearly states that "It does not claim to be poetry: my aim has been to use a straightforward English register and to keep closely to the Greek, allowing Homer to speak for himself -- for example, in the use of repeated epithets and descriptions of recurrent scenes." Verity has carefully preserved the line numeration of the original, yielding a translation which matches the original line by line. The first-time reader of the Iliad might prefer a more classically poetic rendition, such as those by Lattimore, Fitzgerald, or Fagles, or perhaps a faster moving translation such as those by Lombardo, Reck, and, now, Mitchell. But with the Verity translation, the reader can be assured that he/she is getting something that hews quite closely to the original in structure and language, with style and word choices not artificially forced by some particular metrical scheme or in pursuit of rapidity as an end in itself. And the reader may be assured that the translation is by no means dull and plodding. Verity's choice to present his translation in what physically looks like poetic verse (in separate lines rather than a solid mass of prose) serves both to remind us of the Iliad's

origin as a great poem as well as enhance its value as a classroom tool and reference, with lines of the original text readily located in Verity's rendition. And his retention of the characteristic epithets as vital to the poem's meaning (rather than dismissing them as merely technical expedients used to achieve a set meter, as some translators are prone to do) does much to preserve an authentic Homeric flavor. This translation may not have been intentionally written as free verse, but *de facto* it functions as a free verse poem. This is not the finest English poetic rendition of Homer's great poem, but it may well be the best way for an English language reader to best approach the real heart of the *Iliad*.

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